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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001574

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [CG](#)

SUBJECT: ITURI UPDATE: FRPI ATTACKS FARDC POSITIONS, BUT
MAKES OVERTURES TOWARDS DISARMING

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

11. (C) Summary: A series of clashes between the Congolese military and the Patriotic Force of Resistance in Ituri (FRPI) militia has heightened security concerns in the southern part of Ituri District. Two Bangladeshi MONUC peacekeepers were wounded in the latest round of fighting, which resulted in the deaths of at least a dozen militia members, reportedly including several top commanders. While other Ituri militia groups have signaled their willingness to disarm, the FRPI has until now demonstrated no intention of doing so. The militia's recent military losses, however, may be forcing it to rethink its position and accept the disarmament process. End summary.

12. (C) Early in the morning of October 7, members from Cobra Matata's FRPI militia launched an attack on positions of the Armed Forces of the DRC (FARDC) around Avi Heights, near the town of Aveba (approximately 28 miles south of Bunia). According to MONUC military reports, a firefight broke out between the two sides around 6:30am, and FARDC commanders soon called upon a nearby MONUC battalion for assistance. During the battle, the MONUC troops directed mortar fire on the militia positions, and two Bangladeshi peacekeepers were slightly wounded by gunfire. FARDC officers reported they recovered the bodies of at least 12 killed militia members, and said several dozen more were wounded during the attack. MONUC Ituri Brigade Commander General Mahboob Haider Kahn said among the dead were FRPI sub-commander Yuda, along with several other lower-ranking officers of the militia. Kahn said the situation as of October 11 remains under control.

13. (C) The October 7 incident follows another firefight between the FARDC and the FRPI near the village of Singo (approximately 37 miles south of Bunia) on October 1. FARDC Ituri Operations Commander General Mbuayama Nsiona said the incident in Singo began as an internal battle between two factions of the FRPI -- one led by Matata, the other by Yuda -- over control of a local gold mine. Nsiona said the FARDC troops intervened to try to stop the fighting. Ultimately, the FARDC captured the area, which had fallen under militia control some three weeks earlier. The fighting, which lasted some 14 hours according to MONUC military reports, killed three FARDC soldiers, and as many as a dozen FRPI militia members. The FARDC reported another seven of its soldiers were wounded during the battle.

14. (C) General Mahboob said the FRPI likely attacked the positions near Aveba and Singo so as to control access and supply routes towards the Similiki area near the border with Uganda on Lake Albert. He added that the Singo gold mine can help the FRPI purchase supplies across the border. Mahboob

said that corridor has long been suspected of being a main resupply route for weapons and materiel coming from outside Ituri District.

15. (C) The recent firefights with the FRPI appear to have resulted in a change in position of the militia regarding disarmament. Acting MONUC-Bunia Head of Office Peter Swarbrick said FRPI President Emile Muhito contacted MONUC Eastern Division headquarters in Kisangani October 10 to re-establish contact with MONUC and to discuss the demobilization of the militia. (Note: Muhito had previously entered the militia disarmament program in Bunia several months ago, but then mysteriously disappeared from the transit camp in July. It was believed, as now been proven correct, that Muhito left the camp to rejoin the FRPI in the bush. End note.) General Mahboob said the likely explanation for this renewed contact stems from the death of Yuda, who was adamantly opposed to disarmament, causing a rift in the upper ranks of the FRPI. Mahboob added that the military losses in Aveba and Singo have put the militia in complete disarray.

16. (C) Comment: The overture made by the FRPI with regard to disarmament is not likely to receive any substantive response from the GDRC, which has shown no inclination to resolve Ituri's militia problem. With elections quickly approaching, top ministers being replaced, and a new government to be installed in December, there has been no coordination at the highest levels to disarm these remaining militia. Muhito's comments notwithstanding, the FRPI is likely only trying to buy time to regroup and rearm. The attacks on Aveba and Singo were strategic, aimed at bolstering their positions for possible future operations. Even if the FRPI offer to demobilize is sincere, the GDRC will likely let this

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opportunity slip away. End summary.
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